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Many lawmakers face suspension over non-filing of assets

• Asset declaration deadline was extended to Dec 31, 2025 under Elections Act 2017 • 446 lawmakers fail to submit statements by end of year

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Dozens of lawmakers are set to be suspended for failing to comply with the asset-declaration requirement under a lenient law they framed by themselves.

Under the previous legal framework, members of the Senate and the National and provincial assemblies were required to submit annual statements of assets and liabilities to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) by Sept 30. The Elections Act, 2017, extended the deadline to Dec 31, with a two-week grace period.

Section 137 of the Elections Act, 2017, dealing with submission of statement of assets and liabilities, reads: "Every Member of an Assembly and Senate shall submit to the Commission, on or before 31st December each year, a copy of his statement of assets and liabilities including assets and liabilities of his spouse and dependent children as on the preceding thirtieth day of June on Form B."

The Election Commission, through a press release issued on the first day of January each year, "shall publish the names of members who failed to submit the requisite statement of assets and liabilities within the period specified under subsection (1)", it adds.

Moreover, the ECP "shall, on the sixteenth day of January, by an order suspend the membership of a Member of an Assembly and Senate who fails to submit the statement of assets and liabilities by the fifteenth day of January and such Member shall cease to function till he files the statement of assets and liabilities".

The section further notes that where a member submits the statement of assets and liabilities under this section, which is found to be false in material particulars, "he may, within one hundred and twenty days from the date submission of the statement, be proceeded against for committing the offence of corrupt practice".

As many as 446 lawmakers, including federal and provincial ministers and senior political leaders, failed to submit their statements by Dec 31, six months after the close of the financial year. However, under the law, the default would have no consequence for those who manage to file the statements by Jan 15.

The ECP issued what it called a final warning to defaulters, saying its offices would remain open until midnight to receive the declarations. Under the law, those who fail to submit the statements by Jan 15 are to be suspended on Jan 16, and their membership is restored once they file the required documents.

Often, membership of such lawmakers is restored while they enjoy a cup of tea with some officer of the Election Commission.

Last year, the ECP suspended 139 lawmakers on Jan 16, 2025, after they failed to submit their annual statements of assets and liabilities. A total of 518 members of parliament and the four provincial assemblies had not filed the statements by Dec 31, 2024.

SUKKUR: Boats are moored along the river bank, near the Lansdowne Bridge.—PPI

JCP confirms 11 additional judges for Lahore High Court

• Commission grants six-month extension to one ad hoc judge; another denied confirmation • PTI representatives skip meeting yet again

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP), during its fifth session on Thursday, presided over by its chairman, Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi, recommended the confirmation of 11 additional judges of the Lahore High Court (LHC) as permanent judges out of 13.

Even though the commission granted an extension of six months to another additional judge, it declined to approve the confirmation of one judge on the list.

The session was held at the Conference Room of the Supreme Court building to make recommendations for the confirmation of additional judges as permanent judges.

According to a statement issued by the SC, "the commission recommended, by majority of its total membership, the confirmation of the additional judges after due consideration of the relevant data form, antecedents, and evaluation of material placed before it".

Those confirmed are: Justices Hassan Nawaz Makhdoom, Malik Waqar Haider Awan, Sardar Akbar Ali Syed Ahsan Raza Kazmi, Malik Javid Iqbal Wains, Muhammad Jawad Zafar, Khalid Ishaq, Malik Muhammad Awais Khalid, Chaudhry Sultan Mahmood, Tanveer Ahmad Sheikh, and woman judge, Justice Abher Gul Khan.

Similarly, the commission, by a majority of its total membership, recommended an extension of the term of Justice Tariq Mahmood Bajwa for six months, while Justice Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan was not confirmed. As a result, Justice Khan will lose his office as an additional judge of the LHC.

PTI absent

As usual, PTI representatives, namely Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Barrister Syed Ali Zafar, did not attend Thursday's meeting.

They had also skipped the JCP meeting held on Wednesday to recommend the confirmation of six additional judges of the Peshawar High Court (PHC).

In total, the commission, in separate meetings, took up 40 additional judges of different high courts, out of which it recommended the confirmation of 31 additional judges as permanent judges.

These included 11 from the LHC, 10 from the Sindh High Court, six from the PHC, three from the Islamabad High Court, and one from the Balochistan High Court.

Likewise, the JCP extended the terms of seven additional judges of different high courts for another six months, including four from the PHC, two from the SHC, and one from the LHC.

However, during its sessions, the commission did not approve the confirmation of two additional judges — one each from the LHC and BHC. As a result, the two judges will no longer serve as judges of their respective high courts.

PM seeks timely completion of CPEC-II

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to One China Policy and lauded China's generous support to Pakistan, especially through CPEC, and stressed the need for timely implementation of the next phase of CPEC.

The prime minister was talking to members of a Chinese delegation, led by Vice Minister of International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC), Sun Haiyan, who called on the prime minister at the PM House.

The prime minister was assisted during the meeting by SAPM Tariq Fatemi, PM's Special Representative on China, Amb. Zafar Uddin Mahmood, and Foreign Secretary Ambassador Amna Baloch, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

While welcoming the Chinese dignitary and her delegation to Pakistan, the prime minister said it was particularly auspicious that the visit was taking place amid bilateral celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

PM Shehbaz said the year had commenced with the successful visit of the deputy PM to Beijing, followed by a visit by the interior minister to Shanghai. The speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan was also expected to visit China in the coming days, he said.

The prime minister also reiterated his most cordial invitation to President Xi Jinping to undertake an official visit to Pakistan this year, as this was a special year and a milestone for both countries.

The Chinese vice minister thanked the prime minister for his warm welcome and said that China was committed to strengthening its long-standing, time-tested relations with Pakistan across all spheres.

Geographical connectivity key to boosting Pak-Bahrain ties: Zardari

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, who is on a four-day visit to Bahrain, highlighted on Thursday that Pakistan's strategic geographic connectivity, linking South Asia, Central Asia, China and the Middle East, complemented the Gulf country's financial expertise and regulatory framework.

He expressed these views while addressing a reception at the headquarters of Bahrain's Economic Development Board (EDB), which is an investment promotion agency, a statement by the President's Office said.

In his address, the president underscored Pakistan's commitment to expanding economic cooperation, investment partnerships and institutional linkages with Bahrain, the statement said.

He said that the Economic Development Board plays a central role in shaping Bahrain's economic strategy, attracting foreign investment and supporting diversification across key sectors.

The president further observed that the board's close coordination with government institutions and the private sector had helped Bahrain strengthen competitiveness, promote innovation and create a predictable and enabling environment for investors.

President Zardari said the EDB's model of policy coherence and investor facilitation offers a useful reference point for countries pursuing sustainable and inclusive growth.

MANAMA: President Asif Zardari is being briefed by members of the Economic Development Board of Bahrain, as Deputy PM Shaikh Khalid Al Khalifa looks on.—APP

He noted that Pakistan followed Bahrain's development journey with admiration and sees strong complementarities between the two economies.

Highlighting Pakistan's ongoing economic reforms, the president said the country was pursuing stability, digital modernisation and investment-led growth. He pointed to the Special Investment Facilitation Council as a streamlined platform to facilitate investors, with priority sectors including agriculture, information technology, energy, minerals, logistics and tourism.

Moreover, the president identified agriculture and food security, information technology and digital services, renewable energy and logistics as promising areas for Pakistan-Bahrain collaboration.

The president also emphasised Pakistan's strategic geographic connectivity linking South Asia, Central Asia, China and the Middle East, which complements Bahrain's financial expertise and regulatory framework.

While outlining economic opportunities, the president also referred to regional security challenges and their impact on development, reaffirming Pakistan's resolve to counter extremism, strengthen internal security and pursue peaceful relations with its neighbours, while safeguarding national interests.

The president appreciated Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa — who is also the Gulf country's prime minister — for the warm hospitality extended during the visit.—Bakhtawar Mian

Petrol, diesel unchanged, levy increased

ISLAMABAD: The government on Thursday kept the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD) unchanged, but increased the petroleum levy on both products.

According to a press release issued by the Petroleum Division, the price of petrol will remain at Rs253.17 per litre and that of HSD at Rs257.08 for the upcoming fortnight starting January 16.

The petroleum levy was increased by Rs4.65 on petrol and by 80 paise on diesel. Together, the petroleum and carbon levies now total Rs87 on petrol and Rs79 on diesel.

Petrol is primarily used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers, directly affecting the budgets of the middle and lower-middle classes.

Most of the transport sector runs on HSD. Its price is considered inflationary as it is used in heavy transport vehicles, trains, and agricultural engines, particularly contributing to rising prices of vegetables and other food items.—Staff Reporter

Court directs NCCIA to arrest Imaan, Hadi in tweets case

ISLAMABAD: A district court on Thursday cancelled the bail of lawyer and activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir and her husband, Hadi Ali Chattha, in a case related to controversial social media posts after repeated non-appearances.

It also directed the National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency (NCCIA) to arrest the couple and produce them before the court, adjourning the hearing until Friday (today).

It also ordered that their statements under Section 342 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) be recorded through video link.

The case, registered under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (Peca), accuses the two of inciting divisions on linguistic grounds through social media posts and creating the impression that the armed forces were engaged in terrorism within the country.

Thursday's hearing was conducted by Additional District and Sessions Judge Mohammed Afzal Majoka, with Prosecutor Rana Usman representing the state.

At the outset, neither Ms Mazari nor Mr Chattha appeared before the court. An assistant counsel sought an exemption for Ms Mazari, submitting that Mr Chattha was engaged in proceedings related to a contempt case before the high court.

The court expressed displeasure over their absence and noted that the request would be considered later.

Judge Majoka warned that failure to appear would result in the revocation of their right to cross-examination. The hearing was initially adjourned until 12 noon.

When proceedings resumed, Mr Chattha appeared and informed the judge that Ms Mazari wished to personally cross-examine the prosecution witness, Shahroz.

The judge directed them to complete the cross-examination, warning that failure to do so would lead to termination of that right.

Islamabad District Bar Association President Chaudhry Naeem Gujjar appeared in the court and requested that the matter be fixed for Monday, stating that Ms Mazari was unwell but still wished to conduct the cross-examination herself. The prosecutor opposed any adjournment and urged the court to proceed immediately.

The courtroom atmosphere turned tense after a heated exchange between Mr Gujjar and Mr Usman, leading to chaos. Judge Majoka then rose from the bench and ordered a break.

After the break, the couple again failed to appear. The prosecutor alleged misconduct in the courtroom and questioned the conduct of the bar association president.—Malik Asad

Bilawal touts Sindh govt performance to dispel 'negative impression'

• PPP chairman says service delivery improved, institutions strengthened during party's rule • Says health sector allocations increased to nearly 10pc from 2.9pc in 2008; wind farms producing 1,845MW • Recalls how province rebuilt 2.1 million flood-hit homes on climate-resilient lines

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: A day after claiming that 'some powers' wanted to deprive Sindh of its rights, PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Thursday said the province had been consistently strengthening its institutions and improving service delivery, as he went on to list the achievements of the PPP government.

The PPP leader made these comments at an event at the President's House in the federal capital, where he gave a detailed presentation, while negating the impression that Sindh lagged behind other provinces in terms of progress.

Sindh is often portrayed as a "glass half empty" province, he said, adding that the PPP-led government had steadily strengthened institutions and expanded service delivery. In his speech, the PPP chief highlighted the Sindh government's performance since 2008 in the fields of healthcare, education, poverty alleviation, infrastructure, industry, agriculture and revenue generation.

Focusing on healthcare, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said Sindh had increased health sector allocations from 2.9 per cent of the provincial budget in 2008 to nearly 10pc. He also highlighted the expansion of major public hospitals, including the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC), where bed capacity had doubled from 1,100 to 2,200 by 2025, with a target of 3,100 beds by 2028.

He said that the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) operated 11 specialised hospitals and 30 chest pain units across the province. Referring to the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT), he said more than 35 million patients had benefited from its services since 2008, while its bed capacity had increased from 760 to 1,926.

About the education sector, the PPP chairman said that the number of public universities in Sindh had increased from 10 in 2008 to 30, along with 18 additional university campuses across the province.

On poverty alleviation, he said that the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) helped lift 1.4 million women out of poverty through soft loans, with a recovery rate of 98 per cent.

Recalling the devastating floods of 2022, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said around 2.1 million houses were destroyed across the province. In response, the Sindh government launched a massive housing initiative to build 2.1 million climate-resilient homes. Of these, 750,000 had been completed, while around 1.5 million were under construction. He said the project had created nearly one million jobs.

In the agriculture sector, he said the provincial government distributed wheat seed worth over Rs2.1 billion to 215,000 farmers following the floods, leading to a harvest of 4.5 million tonnes the following season.

He claimed that public transport was virtually absent in the province before 2008, but PPP-led initiatives now facilitated daily travel for over 200,000 passengers, including through the introduction of electric buses.

Energy sector

On energy, he said Sindh had the potential to generate 50,000 megawatts of wind energy, alongside vast solar capacity. Currently, 1,845MW is being produced from wind projects. He said 200,000 solar home systems had already been provided to households, with another 275,000 homes set to be solarised.

The PPP chairman also highlighted environmental gains, saying mangrove forest cover in Sindh had expanded from 270,000 acres to a record 675,000 acres.

Addressing revenue generation, he said the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) had collected Rs28 billion in 2011, compared to Rs10 billion collected by the Federal Board of Revenue in 2010, a 68 per cent increase over federal collections at the time. He said the SRB's average annual growth rate of 19 per cent far exceeded the Federal Board of Revenue's 10 per cent.

Calling for fiscal reforms, Mr Bhutto-Zardari proposed devolving the collection of sales tax on goods to provinces, arguing that provincial revenue authorities had consistently outperformed the FBR.

Meanwhile, political circles criticised him for using the platform of the Presidency to outline the performance of the Sindh government. The event took place when Mr Bhutto-Zardari's father, President Asif Ali Zardari, was on an official visit to Bahrain. PM Adviser Rana Sanaullah said in a private TV show: "Bilawal should not have advocated the case of Sindh in the Presidency."